

Essential, Compelling, and Supporting Questions

Essential questions

These are questions that are not answerable with finality in a single lesson or a brief sentence. Their aim is to stimulate thought, to provoke inquiry, and to spark more questions. They are provocative and generative. By tackling such questions, learners are engaged in uncovering the depth and richness of a topic that might otherwise be obscured by simply covering it.

Characteristics of essential questions:

- Open-ended(not content-specific)
- Thought provoking and intellectually engaging
- Calls for higher-order thinking
- Points toward important and transferable ideas
- Raises additional questions
- Requires support and justification
- Recurs over time

Examples of essential questions:

- How do we know how to make good decisions?
- To what extent does power or the lack of power affect individuals?
- How does family play a role in shaping our values and beliefs?
- What turning points determine our individual pathways to adulthood?

Compelling Questions

Compelling questions focus on enduring issues and concerns. They deal with curiosities about how things work; interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts; and unresolved issues that require students to construct arguments in response.

Characteristics of compelling questions:

- Content-specific
- Intriguing, intellectually honest
- Address problems and issues found in and across the disciplines
- Require students to apply disciplinary concepts and skills
- Require students to construct an argument
- Grounded in curriculum and content

Questions for Compelling Questions

- Will the questions get under kids' skin?
- Is it interesting?
- Is there a way to engage students in this question?
- Is there bias? Is there room for argument?

Supporting Questions

Supporting questions focus on descriptions, definitions, and processes on which there is general agreement within the social studies disciplines, and require students to construct explanations that advance claims of understanding in response.

Characteristics of supporting questions:

- Convergent, leading to specific knowledge and understanding in support of the compelling questions
- Guide students as they address compelling questions
- Can be answered with finality in a single lesson
- General agreement in the field
- Require students to construct an explanation
- Grounded in curriculum and content

Compelling Question vs Supporting Question

Compelling Question

What path should the transcontinental pipeline take?

Supporting Question

What are the five largest sources of oil for U.S. Markets?

Compelling Question

Was the American Revolution Revolutionary?

Supporting Question

What were the regulations placed on the colonists under the Townsend Acts?

Compelling Question

Should our community grow?

Supporting Question

Who are community helpers?

Adapted from:

<https://grantwiggins.wordpress.com/2014/12/08/questions-about-questions-ncss-and-ubd/>
www.debbiewagoner.com/uploads/1/2/9/9/.../question_miniteach.pptx